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ABSTRACT

It has been the contention of researchers that the "old heads" (identified by Anderson in 1990 and Wilson in 1987) of the ghettos and barrios of America have voluntarily or involuntarily left the community, leaving behind new generations of youth without adult role models and legitimate social controllers. This absence of an adult strata of significant others adds one more dynamic to the process of social disorganization and social pathology in the inner city. In New York City, however, a different phenomenon was found. Older men (and women) in their thirties and forties who were participants in the "jacket gangs" of the 1970s and/or the drug gangs of the 1980s are still active on the streets as advisors, mentors, and members of the new street organizations that have replaced the gangs. Through life history interviews with 20 "old heads," this paper traces the development of New York City's urban working-class street cultures from corner gangs to drug gangs to street organizations. It also offers a critical assessment of the state of gang theory. Analysis of the development of street organizations in New York goes beyond this study, and would have to include the importance of street-prison social support systems, the marginalization of poor barrio and ghetto youth, the influence of politicized "old heads," the nature of the illicit economy, the qualitative nonviolent evolution of street subcultures, and the changing role of women in the new subculture. (Author/SLD)

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OLD HEADS TELL THEIR STORIES: FROM STREET GANGS TO STREET ORGANIZATIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

by

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Old Heads Tell Their Stories: From Gangs to Street Organizations.

Abstract:
It has been the contention of researchers that the "old heads" (Anderson 1990, Wilson 1987) of the ghettos and barrios of America have voluntarily or involuntarily left the community, leaving behind new generations of youth without adult role models and legitimate social controllers. This absence of an adult strata of significant others adds one more dynamic to the process of social disorganization and social pathology in the inner city. In New York City, however, we have found a different phenomenon. Older men (and women) in their thirties and forties who were participants in the "jacket gangs" of the 1970's and/or the drug gangs of the 1980's are still active on the streets as advisors, mentors and members of the new street organizations that have replaced the gangs. Through life history interviews with 20 "old heads", this article traces the development of New York City's urban working-class street subcultures from corner gangs to drug gangs to street organizations and critically assesses the state of gang theory.

Introduction:

According to most gang research literature, gangs are generally recognized by their practices of delinquency. They may be traditional or cultural (Skolnick 1995), based on territory and the defense of parochial neighborhood spaces (Thrasher 1927, Suttles 1968), "conflict-oriented", "retreatist" or "criminal" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960), depending on the opportunity structure, or "corporate" or "scavenger-like" (Taylor 1990), shaped by emerging drug markets and the proliferation of weaponry among the so-called "underclass". In contrast to these highly deviant gang typologies, a range of street organizations have emerged in New York City that have markedly different characteristics to those found in the literature. The emergence of these phenomena not only challenge existing gang stereotypes but question the explanatory power of conventional gang theory still predicated on Chicago School constructs of social ecology and adaptive behavior.

This article departs from much of this received wisdom and uses British and other contemporary critical studies to argue that the agency of gang members and the historical juncture in which gangs emerge are crucial to an understanding of current New York City street subcultures, represented by such organizations as the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation and the Asociacion de Netas. The study is based on data compiled from the life histories of 20 "old heads" who tell the tale of the city's gang evolution, revealing the transformation of street youth subcultures from delinquent gangs to community-based street social organizations. The article is organized around emergent themes within the respondents' narratives.

Methodology:

(i) Data and Analysis:

The data comes from qualitative life history interviews (each taped and transcribed) with twenty "old heads" who are or have been members of gangs and street organizations in New York City dating back to the 1970's. This selective sample was made up of 17 males and 3 females and they ranged in age from 30-52 years. In addition to these primary data, use wags also made of original documentary film footage of New York City's street gangs produced by Chalfant and Fecher (1989)[1]. The analysis utilizes three basic approaches that are suited to these type of data. First, analytical induction (Sutherland and Cressey 1966) is employed to tease out the organizing themes (Thomas 1992) from the textually rich but often complexly layered personal narratives. Second, to understand the longitudinal dimension of the respondents' stories,(see Berg 1995, Pearson 1993) historiography is utilized. Finally, to develop new theory beyond the existing literature, the extended case study method is employed (Burawoy 1991).

(ii) Gaining Entre:

There were three separate stages to the process of entre. Each stage developed as a result of serendipitous contacts with the respondents, eventually leading to ongoing trusting relationships. These relationships include a strong emphasis on researcher-repondent reciprocity and community solidarity. The initial contact, made in 1994 occurred when one of the researchers shared an educational platform with a respondent. The two developed a rapport which led to the first snowball sample of "old heads". Following this, in 1996, members of a street organization asked a second researcher to lend his journalistic skills to their efforts at countering negative media publicity. This led to a second snowball sample. Finally, in the same year, another researcher was approached by

[1]This was taken from the documentary "Flyin Cut Sleeves" made by Henry Chalfant and Rita Fecher and distributed by Cinema Guild, New York City.

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all three street organizations, requiring his help in providing a neutral space for their regular meetings. This third contact is the current basis of a long term collaborative research project.

(iii) Collaborative Research:

Mirroring the collaborative research approach to the study of street gangs by Moore (1978) and Hagedorn (1988), a trusting and mutually respectful relationship was developed with the subjects over time. This methodology is useful when attempting to equalize the power relations between the researchers and the subjects and to ensure that knowledge produced from the research can be returned to the subjects' community. At all times, therefore, the researchers bore in mind that they were there to learn from the subjects without the presumption that their own expert knowledge is superior to the self-understandings of the researched.

To carry this out, the project, in part, had to be defined by the subjects themselves. Thus, the themes of the interviews were developed not simply based on the academic or grant-funding concerns of the researchers, e.g. trying to fill "knowledge gaps" in the literature, but by what the subjects themselves felt (i) the outside world should know about them, (ii) would be helpful for the community to know and remember, and (iii) would be helpful to understand their own past and present. It is crucial to remember that the subjects of this study remain active in the community and that their historical narratives contain powerful testimonies of a past that is rarely chronicled. The research was reflexive in that each interview was returned to the respective interviewee for comments, discussion and further elaboration along with various drafts of this article.

Cross-Atlantic Thinking on Delinquent and Gang Subcultures:

In the past, Thrasher (ibid.) discussed gang subcultural traditions in terms of adaptational behavior and practices that allowed these poverty besieged youth to survive in the disorganized

environment of the inner-city. Thrasher asserted that "The gang is an interstitial group, originally formed spontaneously, then integrated through conflict" (1927:46). Thus, these youth, lacking a sufficient institutional infrastructure in the form of family, school, and church, often raised themselves in street play groups that later became the social, territorial and identificational basis for the growing terrain of gang subcultures.

While, Thrasher mentioned the involvement of these gangs in delinquency, it was left to Shaw and McKay (1969) to develop an epidemiological model that pointed to the reproduction of delinquent subcultural traditions in ghetto and slum communities. As Klein argues, it is this "criminal orientation" that leads the gang to be viewed and/or labelled by society as deviant which, in turn, heightens the members' identification with gang membership and solidifies group cohesion. Combining these empiricist, crime-centered constructions of the gang with Arnold's (1966) defining characteristics of gang activity, the criteria by which gangs are generally assessed within these criminological discourses are: (i) structure, (ii) crime/delinquency, (iii) territory, (iv) integration/cohesion, (v) conflict (vi) anti-social agenda, and (vii) community perceptions.

Though rarely incorporated into American gang studies, the British cultural school of Hall et al. also approached the study of delinquent subcultures. Influenced not only by Chicago School naturalism and criminological functionalism but by Gramsci's (1971) and Williams' (1965) work on political and cultural hegemony.

The British school, locating the emergence of youth subcultures historically, asserted that during the rapid expansion of monopoly capitalism after the Second World War (Baran and Sweezy 1966), the phenomenon of a youth culture first arose within American and then British societies . This culture, with its own distinctive values, symbols and norms, grew out of and reflected the

contradictions within Western society's expanding systems of mass production, consumption and exchange. [2] Thus, these post-war youth, undergoing both common and highly differentiated encounters with the new mass culture of commodities, appropriated and created their own symbolic markers (or economy of signs) that partially articulated the access of each strata to levels and types of consumption, housing, wealth, occupational status, quality of education, political power and/or cultural valoration. Within these matrices of race, class and gender, an array of "spectacular subcultures" developed which reflected "in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives. This tension is figuratively expressed in the form of subcultural style...." (Hebdige, 1979:132). Linking the oppressive cultural and political structures and superstructures of a post-war society to the proliferation of new youth subcultures, the British school recast this development among youth as resistant (Corrigan 1979)[3], self-contradictory (Willis 1977) and within a struggle for transcendance (Brake 1985) of structural boundaries.

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Not surprisingly, examples of these "spectacular subucultures" emerged among the legions of working-class, white ethnic and minority youth in New York City's poorest neighborhoods. First made famous through the musical West Side Story in the 1950's, these youth gang subcultures, often

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5This is the era, therefore, of terms, products and cultural events that all have a particularly youthful significance, e.g. the convertible car, the teenager, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, youth dances and youth clothing.

3 In the American research literature, a similar phenomena was discussed by Moore (1978). Her ethnographic studies of the Latino barrio gangs of Los Angeles, led her to describe them as "oppositional collectives" with values and practices that were resistant to the work ethic and consumerist pretentions of the middle-class dominated society.

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referred to as jacket gangs, continued to develop and multiply well into the 1970's. One indication of their proliferation was the signing of a Peace Treaty in 1973 by 42 South Bronx jacket gangs (Chalfant and Fecher, ibid.).

During the 1980's these groups began to decline and almost disappeared with the exception of a few residual units (Campbell 1991). However, these were soon replaced by crews, some of which were organized around tagging (Chalfant 1985), but mostly were derived from and responding to the new opportunity structures of the ever mutating drugs trade. These crews contained many members from the former jacket gangs although they also drew on a new generation of marginalized youth growing up in the barrios and ghettos of the city. The crews were different in both appearance and substance, and reflected many of the changed environmental conditions and dynamics of the city's poorest areas, now thoroughly deindustrialized (Kasarda 1989, Bluestone 1989, Vergara 1995).

In the 1990's the youth subcultures of New York City again qualitatively transformed, this time emerging as "street organizations" that sought to break with their gang pasts and proactively come to terms with ghetto life. Below is a table that compares the characteristics of these three subcultural types.

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	Jacket Gangs	**Street Crews**	**Street Organizations**
Period	1970's	1980's	1990's
Structure	Vertical	Loose/Situational	Vertical/Contingent
Territory	local turfs	drug spots	extra-territorial
Ideology	street lore/some radicalism	street entrepreneurial	communitarian/utopian
Delinquency	"cafeteria-type"	drug focused	anti-delinquent

Types

	Jacket Gangs	Street Crews	Street Organizations
Conflict Management	negotiated terrains	market competitive	conflict mediation/ arbitration
Symbolism	clothing/names/graffiti	conspicuous consumption	beads/colors/meetings/banners
Integration	relatively well integrated	situational	well integrated/ high solidarity
Duration	10 years	temporary	long term commitment

Combining both American and British theoretical approaches, a comparative interpretation of each of these subcultural characteristics is offered in following section.[4] What is striking is not only the comparison over time between these three group types but, on issues of delinquency, territory and ideology, how demarcated the contemporary street organizations are from the previous two subcultures.

FROM FIGHTING SUBCULTURES TO STREET ORGANIZATIONS:

Group Types

The jacket gangs of New York City, consisting primarily of Puerto Rican and African-American working-class youth, emerged in Manhattan, the South Bronx and Brooklyn during the late 1960's and early 1970's.

> (D: Back then, when I was growing up in the early 70's it was street gangs. I'm talkin' about street-gangs where individuals cut off their dungaree-jackets, put fur around them and then put on their colors. Those are gangs, not like now.

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4 Respondents who are currently active in the street organizations have been given pseudonyms.

(R): What gangs do you remember?

(I): I remember The Tomahawks, the Black Peacestone, The Saigon, The Vanguards, Crazy Hammer Sides, The Jolly Stompers, The Hellcats, Dynamite Brothers..I could go on and on. (Mr. R., The Bronx).

According to the "old heads", they grew up within a lower class cultural milieu (Miller 1958) of dozens of youth subcultures in their respective neighborhoods. Their outlaw-type names, part of the complex signification process embedded in young working-class identity construction, were symbolic reactions to the marginal and marginalizing environment within which these youth were raised.

(R) So lets say we call ourselves the Chelsea Street Boys. Ok, we grew up together. We might have been into sports and now we're a gang. So what happens if any little incident happens? They wanna blame them. And throughout the whole course of this, they take on the negative role. That's what happend to us. We used to get blamed for everything. The police used to harass us and accuse of this and that. In the end we said ok if you think we're bad we might as well be bad. (Mr. B., ex-President of the Savage Skulls).

These jacket gangs, similar to the traditional, cultural gangs discussed by Skolnick (ibid.), accorded with many of the characteristics found in the traditional U.S. gang literature. Their adherents were large in ove,all number, spreading throughout the five boroughs of New York City, possessed defined rules and roles of membership, and succeeded in creating a powerful sub-system of values, rituals and communication that attracted many of the city's most marginalized young people. At the end of the 1970's these groups began to disappear, their social and physical spaces destroyed by landlord-inspired arson (Vergara, ibid.) and their numbers, particularly their

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leaderships, depleted by the arrival of heroin and its self-destructive, criminalized properties. [5]

The 1980's, however, saw the appearance of a different type of street grouping that was built on the illegal opportunity structures (Cloward and Ohlin, ibid.) offered by the mushrooming marijuana, heroin, and later, crack cocaine drug trade. Members of these groups also combined their drug activities with other low level criminal activity.

> I was a stick up kid too. At that time, I was sticking up numbers, joints and drug dealers. We were making a lot of money, just our little crew within the B's. (Mr. H. a former crew member emerging from a jacket gang in the South Bronx)."

> I hooked up with them when I was 13 years old. We were into stuff like extortion, selling drugs, running prostitution, numbers everything. We were about making money and hanging out." (Mr. C. formerly of the Hart Street Dragons).

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[5] Cambpell (1991) gives arson by landlords in poor neighborhoods (to collect on insurance) as the main reason for the relative disappearance of many of these jacket gangs during the 1980's. In other words, the systematic burning down of privately-owned houses and tenements destroyed many of the gangs' club houses and disrupted their territorial domains. Paradoxically, she seems to argue that there can be forms of social disorganization that are too extreme even for the development of street gangs. In contrast, not one of the respondents cited this as the reason but rather pointed to the flooding of these areas with drugs, most notably heroin. Mr. P. below discusses this form:

> "Part of the dynamics in our community is that the gangs of those times were number one, a means for the younger people to survive against, like, the Italians that used to be down on ...Avenue and down below 96th Street. All that was destroyed by heroin. It was an influx of heroin that was directly related to the Vietnam conflict and the CIA's involvement in the Vietnam conflict and how they would gather intelligence and trade opium for intelligence....because of the heavy urban unrest they would bring heavy heroin into the Black and Latino communities, and El Barrio was no exception. And so the way the gangs were destroyed by them was the addiction of heroin in the young people. This destroyed the organizations. (Mr. P. The Bronx).

These crews or posses proliferated throughout New York City's poorest neighborhoods (Sullivan 1989) at a time when manufacturing jobs were lost at a rate greater than any other large American city (Fitch 1993) and services to the least affluent were dramatically pared as part of the city's "planned shrinkage" response to the fiscal crisis of the early seventies.

In the late 1980's, the dominant youth subcultures in the city again changed their form and large organized gangs came back that, at first, were not so different from the old jacket gangs. As Mr. R., a 1970's member of the Latin Kings, put it:

> "They were into gang-banging, negativity, and that sort of thing. I didn't want to be involved in that again."

However, in the early 1990's, with the emergence of a new leadership and a more heterogeneous membership [6] these gangs began to transform themselves into street organizations or cultural associations for self and community empowerment.

> "We are now moving into a different phase. We are now moving to become a social movement. The old ways of doing things are behind us. We are not saying we have not been responsible for things in the past but that is over. We have to look toward to the future."(Mr. H., advisor to the Latin Kings)

Structure

> "Let me put it to you, its like a big committee. OK? We say, "Well, this is the problem here." Its like the Chrysler Corporation. They got the president, the vice-president and this

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6 The membership now included youth from the most marginalized social classes along with college-going students, school-oriented youth without criminal records, working-class family men and women and even professionals.

guy, the president says, "Well, this is here. I wanna give him all the information about the sales, whatever." (Mr. B., ex-Savage Skulls).

The organizational structure of the jacket gangs was always vertical (Jankowski 1991), as Mr. B attests above, based on the pyramidal design of a corporation or the traditional hierarchy of a social club. The groups' members socially hung out together on a daily basis, either in their club houses or on street corners and assembled weekly to discuss their business. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on the role of leadership and the position of the President was a prized one. Under him in the hierarchy was the Vice-President, the War Lord, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the.....all of whom met to decide on group policy before putting it to the members - although it was the President that made the final decisions. As the numbers grew and their activities took hold not only in many of New York City's poorest neighborhoods but in other states and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico, they were divided into semi-autonomous units.

"We had 25 divisions throughout the boroughs and when I got locked up, thats when the whole thing fell apart. Nobody could keep it together." (Mr. B., ex-Savage Skulls)

Although school, law enforcement and media renditions of gang life often include references to gang members systematically recruiting youngsters (Brotherton 1994), this practice rarely emerged in the interviews. However, they did include the custom of initiation:

"There was an initiation where we put a 45 record on, and sometimes my brother would put on an album. If the record was scratched then forget it! You had to fight 5 guys until the record was finished. So, ok, you fight the guys and you pass the test but you still didn't have your colors yet. Then we'd go to the gasoline station on 162nd street and there was a bottle of dirty oil. You would dunk yourself this high (points to his waist - author) and then you had

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to stay like that for a week in the club." (Mr. Y., ex-President of the Ghetto Brothers).

In comparison, the drug crews were much less structured with none of the formal titles described above nor did they remain in existence for long periods of time, consequently they did not build up the subcultural histories and traditions of the jacket gangs. Rather, they were short-lived, locally organized small groups, made up of neighborhood friends and associates. They primarily concentrated their activities on the execution of criminal tasks, adapting their organization to a fast moving, drug-oriented environment (Fagan 1989).

> "I didn't deal hand-to-hand. Basically, the spot or the place where the drugs were sold was mine, or me and a group of guys. We got together, put the money together, one of the guys was older and he knew we could work it. He made sure we worked. So, all we did was go buy, collect money, hang out, collect money, buy clothes..that was basically it." (Mr. S. ex-crew member, the South Bronx).

The street organizations are different again to the crews and place great store in their ability to organize, multiply their ranks and maintain their inner solidarity. Their organizational system has been written and is followed assiduously. Like the jacket gangs, as these groups have grown they have been subdivided into semi-autonomous units. In the case of the Latin Kings, these are called "tribes" and each tribe is led by a group of five crowns with a supreme crown in overall charge of the tribe. As with the jacket gangs there is one President, or Inca, who currently heads a Supreme Team which makes policy decisions for the entire organization.

Similar to the jacket gangs, there is a strict division of labor in these organizations, with members nominated to positions such as Secretary of State, Public Relations Officer, Political Advisor and Santo (essentially Spiritual Advisor). These positions change as the needs of the

organization change but the duties are taken very seriously, and unlike the jacket gangs, the members are more accountable for their actions and group responsibilities. As these organizations have emerged out of their gang stage they have had to change a number of the rules, particularly those rules that included severe, physical punishments for rule transgressions and initiations.

> "To get initiated nowadays you have to first go through a period of probation until we know that you really want to be a King or Queen. Then we ask you to do some form of community service such as work in one of the soup kitchens or help with the distribution of clothes to the poor. We are not into recruiting anymore. We don't have to recruit, people are coming to us continuously and asking if they can join." (Ms. R., Latin Queen)
>
> "When I became Inca the number one rule I made was a brother could never, ever kill another brother again. No matter what we find them guilty of. Because we contradict everything we stand for. .....The death penalty was abolished, never to be brought back. And I think the Nation loves that about the movement now." (Mr. F. the Latin Kings).

Without recruiting or physical punishment the universals (general meetings), often resembling a revival, take on a special significance for the discipline and maintenance of the organization's local and state structure[7]. The three largest street organizations in New York City hold

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7 The following is part of the agenda from a recent universal of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, Inc.
KINGS DAY UNIVERSAL AGENDA

Latin Kings - Queens Anthem by King E
Kings Prayer by King M
Queens Pray by Queen A
Prayer for the deceased by King I
Minute of Silence
Introductions of the Body - Supremas - Inka

monthly or bi-monthly all-inclusive universals, at which internal business is discussed and the various leaders from the different sub-divisions constantly confer with one another. It is at these meetings that the main leaders get to rally the membership, providing them with (i) information on future activities, (ii) an analysis of the organization's progress and the obstacles facing the movement, and (iii) an oral history of the group. The following excerpt from my field notes (10/21/96) provide an insight into this process:

> Roughly 400 LK's are in attendance. They pack the inside of the church, covering all the pews and then line up along both sides. Most of those in attendance are young men between the ages of 16 and 20 years old, along with significant numbers in their late 20's and early 30's. Some of the older male members have their children in their arms. About 50 Latin Queens are also present. They sit together on the left side of the church, many with their children sitting beside them. The leadership is positioned at the front of the church, high on the steps in front of the altar. 10 Latin Kings stand in front of Inca and his supreme crowns as security detail.
>
> .....After several speakers, including the Cacique, or Vice-President, and one of the leaders of the Latin Queens, the Inca rises to speak. He has a few notes in his hand as he strides confidently to the rostrum.
>
> "The truth is that we are a true and great nation. Yet we seem to feel that we have to walk with our heads down because that's the way we have been treated as Latins all our lives. But we don't have to. King N touched on a very sensitive point there, we are in a war at the

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moment and this goes back to 1940 and not just 1986. The struggle goes on, its like a roller coaster, its full of ups and downs."

Territory

Stark (1993) and Corrigan (1979) have drawn attention to the use of free time by working-class youths, interpreting "hanging out" not simply as an example of idleness but as a forced outgrowth and reaction to industrial society's authority over time, space (Harvey 1996, Lefebvre 1991) and age segregation (Greenberg 1993). Hence, "hanging out" can be seen as an expression of resistance to the routinized needs of capitalist social relations[8] and the schooling systems they help to shape (Bowles and Gintis 1977). Reflecting on this repressed desire for autonomy and control in their daily life, Mr. B. below, discusses what so much of the gang's social life consisted:

(R) When I started the Skulls, it was just us, you know, we used to hang out in the park, we used to break night, you know, we used to stay out, it was just us and the girls. We took out a burned-out building, we cleaned it out, we made it liveable, you know, and we would just hang out in the park. We used to drink in there, like that nobody'll bother us, we bothered nobody, just kept to ourselves. (Mr. B., ex-Savage Skulls)

Over time, it was out of this activity of "hanging out" among friends, that the jacket gangs were formed. Just as they constructed a nominal identity for themselves, they also "imagined" (Anderson, ibid.) themselves to be within intricate borders that overlay the racial and ethnic

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[8]Stark (1993) historically locates this process as follows:
"The gangs that young immigrants organized in nineteenth-century cities, at least so far as many of the working poor were concerned, made the refusal to be socialized a living alternative to schedules of factory production, individuated reproduction, and "valorization" (i.e., giving all human activity a market price)."

residential zones of the members. These borders became their territories or psycho-social spheres of control (Vigil 1988) whose real and symbolic properties (i.e., marked by early examples of graffiti) frequently led to inter-gang conflict. However, since these zones of gang influence were within densely populated, ethnically mixed residential areas of public and private housing, it did not produce the no-go zones often contained in accounts of Los Angeles and Chicago gang wars.

Rather, the gang territories were negotiated domains, with members able to wear their jackets in some zones and not in others. Thus, these gangs were constantly involved in generating and regenerating feuds and alliances with and against other gangs, which became a precondition of their existence.

> "The Batchelors were a force to be reckoned with. Basically they ran the South Bronx. We always respected the Bronx as far as boundaries go, you wouldn't step into their territory but when they would try coming over the bridge it was on, you know. We had to do what we had to do to defend ourselves. What they were trying to do was to come in and take over. You know, eliminate the Kings, the Aces and the Saints, to make them Batchelors, Savage Skulls or Nomads because they were all cliqued together up there in the Bronx." [9] (Mr. R. ibid.)

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[9]Did this engagement in physcial conflict alienate these gangs from the community? Jankowski (ibid.) asserts that there was much more acceptance of these gangs than is popularly believed and it is only when they become involved in acts of extreme violence that the community refuses to tolerate them, thus signaling their demise. Mr. B., below, formerly of the Savage Nomads, paints a different picture, one in which the community had ambivalent and often negative feelings about the groups.

> (R) Those that knew us accepted us. They brought us food and drink and let us hang out in their homes. We would do things for them and they kind of liked us. Those that didn't know us, hated us and they would let us know that by calling the police and that sort of thing. So, we let them know we didn't like them and that's how we might have got a bad name.

In comparison, the closest that the crews came to expressions of territory was in the boundary maintainenance of drug spots which were centered on market domains. Like capitalist enterprises, crew members wanted to keep competitition down to a minimum, which they could only do physically by protecting their own selling areas or muscling in on others, or through marketing strategies that undercut rival dealers.

> "So, the first thing I did, I took the two bundles and I give them out to everybody for free to . all the junkies and I said, "If you bring me customers, I give you a dollar every bag and I give you a morning bag and a night bag so you won't ever be sick."....Later he (the supplier - author) gave me five bundles. I called him in a half-hour, it was gone. I was known in a matter of two months. I was counting thirty five hundred dollars every two days." (Mr. T. ex-crew member, Brooklyn)

Still, the struggle for and defense of drug turfs could be very intense. In Mr. T's case below it mushroomed into an expression of inter-ethnic rivalry.

> "So the biggest war broke out between the Dreads and us, you know, the Latinos on the block. Even though I had hair like the Dreads, we were still Dominican and Puerto Rican. We wanted to be like them but we didn't want them taking over our neighborhood." (Mr. T., ibid.)

In terms of territory, the new street organizations are markedly different from either the jacket gangs or the crews. As they build their organizations into nations, the pertinence of parochial boundaries is lessened. As a result, the members and leadership tend to have a much broader vision

of their organization's aims, which dramatically reduces the potential for inter-gang feuding.

> "We don't claim any particular territory. We are not into that kind of gang-banging mentality, that belongs to the past. We don't think its worth dying over flying your color against another group....for what? To say that you're down with your group? I don't think so. We have lost a lot of good people to that kind of mentality and to me the only winners are the Mayor and the cops - the ones that want us to kill each other off. We learned from our mistakes and we don't intend to repeat them." (Mr. F., the Latin Kings).

Ideology and Politics

It is often asserted in the gang literature that any conscious attempt to develop an ideology, or a set of beliefs that defend and reflect the interests of a certain class (Robertson 1987), are absent among gang members. Certainly, for many members of the jacket gangs, there was a limited concern for political matters of the neighborhood (let alone the nation state) and most of what was discussed when gang members interacted was restricted to the immediate concerns of the gang, such as who the group was now aligned with, threats from other gangs, the induction of new members, criminal proceedings against individuals and so on.

> "At that time, all of this was fun. We didn't have anything else to do. That's how we lived. It's a lot different from today. In the old days, this was how we survived, it was an everyday thing. There were no people out there telling us that there were better ways of doing things. The only guys who I looked up to at that time were the older guys who used to shoot numbers." (Mr. C., the Dragons).

Despite this tendency toward localism, some jacket gang leaders, surrounded by the social

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protest and revolutionary politics of the 1960's, [10] were deeply affected by the radicalism of the ghetto and barrio. Mr. Y., ex-president of the Ghetto Brothers, below discusses the founding of his group and its transition toward a street-based political youth group committed to community empowerment, self-determination and gang unity against the Establishment.

(R) The organization began when I started seeing the political organizations coming up like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, the Puerto Rican Independence movement. I was a Nacionalista though I couldn't see myself saying, "Viva The Young Lords." No, that sounded too gangish for me, but the Puerto Rican Socialist Party sounded legit. That's where I wanted to go.

(I) What was the aim of the Ghetto Brothers?

(R) It was to bring all our brothers and sisters together. Its was to do something for the community. To get rid of the drunks, to get rid of the pimps, to get rid of the prostitution, to get into education, to get into all of this.

In general, however, the example of the Ghetto Brothers was the exception to the rule. Most of the other groups did not take up radical political causes and therefore did not develop a counter-cultural or anti-Establishment ideology. Rather, they remained within their own subterranean gang value system that was culturally oppositional but undeveloped in terms of a cohesive system of thought and action . Similarly, the crews did not advance an oppositional ideological line and, in fact, adopted many of the shibboleths of the dominant class culture in pursuing their entrepreneurial aims.

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10 Characterized by the civil rights, the Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American and Black Nationalist movements, and the domestic and international campaigns against the Vietnam War.

The contemporary street organizations are quite different to both these types and, if anything, resemble more closely the Ghetto Brothers. For example, the Netas, formed in the Puerto Rican prison system by Carlos La Sombra, a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, are strongly motivated by their commitment to unite, defend and empower the Latino community, fight racism, agitate against the colonialist subjugation of Puerto Rico and advocate for prisoners' rights. Similarly, the Latin Kings are wedded to the doctrine of Kingism from which many of the group's lessons are drawn. This belief system, an eclectic mix of spiritualism, self-help prisoner guidance and community/nationalist empowerment themes, is thoroughly infused with the politics of social justice. Like the Netas and Zulu Nation, the Latin Kings have been active in opposing police brutality and the racism within public educational and criminal justice systems. [11]

In the following exchange, the Inca of the Latin Kings is addressing inmates during a Christmas mass. Like the founder of the Netas, the leader of the Latin Kings is someone from the

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11Taking back the ghetto is a critical principle of many street organizations and is reminiscent of the radical self-determining visions of 60's minority activists. However, it takes place in an era of late- or post-modernity (Giddens 1994), a
period in which politics is decentered and parties, government and institutions retreat from their previous obligations to make and remake civil society. Beck calls this the "risk society" and sees the proliferation of "sub-politics" who are groups and/or individuals, often non-traditional political actors, intent on "shaping society from below "(1994:23). In this context, the Inca of the Latin Kings voices his commitment to his community and his contempt for those who flee the neighborhood:

> "I'm telling the community: "How could you say you love the fucking community? How could you preach all this good shit and the first opportunity you get, you jet? I've had that opportunity and I refuse to leave. They have to kill me in the ghetto, or they have to move the ghetto....And I think that if more people would take that concept into the street and the schools and everything there wouldn't be a ghetto....We want to support people running for office who are going to support our community. But we are not going to be led by someone who just promises us things, uses us and then forgets about us when its convenient. No, we have had that all our lives..."

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streets who knows the injustices of the correctional system first-hand. He is attentively listened to by the 100 inmates present, many of whom do not belong to the same organization.

> "I know what its like to be locked up, to be isolated, to get cut up, to have to defend yourself. I been there and I know that ain't the way to go. We gotta find a better way. So, the last time I came out I vowed I'd never go back but they set me up. Some corrupt cops from the X precinct set me up on a gun charge, but I beat it. I faced 15 years for that rap and I beat it and I never thought I'd be coming back here again without shackles on. But here I am 'cos this system can't run away from the truth, from the righteous. That's the way I see the struggle now. It don't matter if your'e a King, a Neta, a Blood, it don't matter whether you're white, or black or brown. It ain't about your color, my brothers, its about your love and respect. What I wanna say today is that we have to bring peace to this institution because if we don't we only gonna let the system keep oppressing us and giving more and more jobs to the CO's (correctinal officers), the cops and all those who wanna keep us locked down both inside and out."

Delinquency

In orthodox criminological literature, delinquency is a major criterion for proclaiming a gang's existence and certainly a significant amount of "cafeteria-type" delinquency (Klein 1971) was reported by the "old head" members of the jacket gangs. This included truancy, fighting, petty larceny, car theft and even extended to deadly assault.

> "I've been going to jail since the age of nine. Group houses came first. I went to a real jail for the first at the age of 16. I had stabbed a guy 36 times. He had hit a couple of our guys with a car. And then, the guys that he didn't hit, he didn't want to leave any witnesses, so he

put the car in reverse and tried to run us down. The he jumped out. By that time I was so scared that I took out my pen knife, a Boy Scout knife, and I started sticking him." (Mr. C., former member of The Dragons).

However, what is important to remember is the context in which this took place. The youth in these jacket gangs were from the lowest class-racial strata, experiencing many of the pathologies that conditions of poverty induce such as disengagement from legitimate adult authority, rejection of and being rejected by public and parochial schools, a paucity of meaningful employment and job training opportunities, cultural invisibility and the constant threat of the criminal justice system. Brother R., a former jacket gang member and now a leader of Zulu Nation, recalls his working-class upbringing.

"My mother worked for minimum wage damn near all her life. She dropped out of school at four years old and went to work in the fields in Puerto Rico. My father was a truck driver and used to work for the city but never passed on the light to us. Myself, the highest paying job I ever had was workin' in the mortuary."

At the same time, many of these youth were in the throes of adjusting between two worlds, either having been brought north by Southern black families or having immigrated with their families from Puerto Rico. One consequence of these twin dynamics of social displacement and inadeqate humanistic socialization was the norm of living on the street from a young age. Thus, by their early teens, these youth had already become socialized by the streets' survivalist, "living off your wits" codes of conduct. [12]

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12 It is important to remember that this process is a social fact that is connected to the sharp changes in the local and global economy which constantly disgorges large layers of working-

"Nobody had a place to live, so we all lived there. Nobody lived with their parents; either on the roof, basements, hallways, wherever we could sleep. On a typical day, we'd spend it stealin', getting into trouble, starting fights. Every day was like that, just the same every day. You get up, you go rob the milkman and the bread man. They started giving us bread so we wouldn't rob them." (Mr. C., ex-crew member, Brooklyn).

As stated, the crews carried out more specialized acts within the illegal economy. Their members, mostly high school truants and drop-outs, were well on their way to developing the "moral careers" (Becker 1963) of the criminal. Faced by the deepening poverty of New York's dual society (Castells and Mollenkopf 1991), these youth saw their membership in the crews as a realistic means to "get paid" and have a social life.

"We were dealing herb. I had like 5 or 6 guys working for me. Ours was petty stuff, half ounces, ounces, nickel bags, even in some instances loose joints. Yo, I give you 100 joints, go to the beach and bring me back 60. Then we decided to try tray bags. I mean were just business men. We had everything we wanted. I had all the girls I wanted." (Mr. H., South Bronx).

The street organizations, however, although they consist of some members who are still selling drugs and who are involved in crime, are eager to develop an alternative mindset to the fatalism inspired by the ghetto economy. With so many members already incarcerated, and many more who have experienced prison, physical violence, drug use and abuse, they are attempting to help members reconstruct their lives through networks of mutual support and consistent messages

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class people, having a dramatic impact on their youth and children.

of self- and cultural affirmation. At the same time, they are quite aware that a different route to personal survival is also shaped by economic realities.

> "We want to try to build up some form of self-sufficiency. At the moment we are working trying to provide jobs to our members. You know, its very difficult when you have a criminal record to get a job. I would say its almost impossible a lot of the time. So, we recognize that many of our members when they come out need to be helped especially if we are to try to prevent them going back into the old ways because thats all there is (Ms. R., ibid.).

Conflict

> "I think rivalry came after we got away from the scene, with the guys that really didn't know the origins and didn't know...you understand, how close we were. I used to tell my guys, "Yo, you can't fight with them. That's such and such." But some of the new chapters didn't know." (Mr.B., ex-President, the Savage Nomads).

Among the jacket gangs, nearly all of the fighting that occurred was "expressive" (Block and Block 1993), typically arising from disputes around perceived malicious intentions, disrespect for local turf boundaries and transgressions of personal honor (Horowitz 1983). As discussed, the crews mainly fought over drug turfs and interpersonal disputes. The street organizations of today, however, have learned many bloody lessons from internal conflicts of the past and have instituted their own forms of conflict resolution.

> (R) How do you resolve internal conflicts?
>
> (I) It depends on the conflict. Usually, if two brothers are having a problem we have an arbitrator. They would take the person who has the most knowledge, the most life

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knowledge, or sometimes they would go in front of the whole meeting and each one says what they feel happened and the brothers will vote if they have to. Sometimes we have to counsel them, but if I don't have an answer then somebody else will and we keep looking until we find it. But every man and woman has to make their choice in their own life....One thing we don't allow is physical fighting among our members. (Mr. L., Netas).

This commitment to a peaceful process of dispute resolution within the ranks has led to a sharp reduction in the deaths and injuries among the members (for example, in the trial against King Blood, the District Attorney produced evidence of at least 20 murders among the Latin Kings during the period from 1986-1991). This does mean that gangs that have not ascended to a new "stage" in their development (the Latin Kings say that they are at the third stage as they move toward becoming a fully integrated nation), are going to cease inter-group rivalry. An important test, therefore, for the street organizations is whether they can hold their members in check when provoked and forestall a destructive and potentially disastrous escalatory spiral of conflict (Hocker and Wilmot 1995). Nonetheless, contrary to much law enforcement thinking on the subject, the likelihood of the organization returning to its gang days is not inevitable. In a recent attack on the Latin Kings by members of a relatively new gang, the leadership managed to contain the situation through adroitly mobilizing the membership into political street action.

"We had two of our brothers shot over the weekend.....some of our brothers wanted to go and fire up the projects but I said no. That's what they wanted us to do....so we held a peace rally with over 500 Latin Kings present and invited the mother of the kid who shot our members. She was frightened of me. She thought I was gonna order the Nation to hit at her family. I said to her, "Look, I wouldn't want anything to happen to my family for something I didn't

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do and what I don't want for them I don't want for anyone else. The Nation is not going down that road anymore." (Mr. F., The Latin Kings).

Symbolism

The jacket gang names, connoting evil and the audacious, precocious outsider, symbolically inverted the powerlessness that was being experienced in the youths' daily lives (Brake ibid.). Hence, many of their cultural symbols, i.e., clothing, group monikers and function titles, were borrowed from the middle and upper classes. Once appropriated, these symbols became, literally, the property of the new subcultures and subject to their own myriad, "from below" interpretations. This transgressive act is akin to what Conquergood calls "performance rhetoric" (ibid:3) and embodies the tension between two discursive systems: that of official society (or high culture) complemented by its fetishistic processes of commodification and that of the street (or low culture) and its underground "naming and renaming, symbolizing and resymbolizing, empowering and disempowering" (1992:3).

(I) Why did you choose to do all the lettering in that old English style?

(R) Royalty. It gives you that something, you know, your'e special and you stand out as opposed to block letters, say. When people saw that they saw the royalty, they saw the style. (Mr. Y., ex-Ghetto Brothers)

This "slippage" (Conquergood, ibid.) between the two cultures, with so much emphasis placed on symbolic representation, was not present with the crews, except for those who were fully immersed in the subcultural art worlds of graffiti. The drug crews, whose raison d'etre was the acquisition of status, wealth and power, had little time for such symbolic playfulness. For them, it was enough to brandish artifacts of conspicuous consumption such as cars, gold jewelry and women.

"....and so in the eighties, even though I was studying, I was still on this drug thing. My people started coming out of jail, so we created a new empire. Now we were living in New Jack City. I went from falling asleep and riding the A train from one end to the other to the windows of the world. Drinking Don Perignon with two bimbos on my back, you know, I mean now we had money. Now we were living large again. Now there was jewelry, the cars, the limos..." (Mr. H., the South Bronx).

The contemporary street organizations, however, place great importance on their symbolic displays, since crafting a new identity is a critical element of self discovery and group self-determination. Below is a table that highlights some of the current symbolic artifacts and gestures of the street organizations and their complex set of interpretive meanings.

Symbols/Artifacts/Gestures	**Interpretive Meanings**
multi-colored beads worn as necklace, similar to rosary	group affiliation/position in hierarchy/length of membership sacrifice for group/initiation blessing
hand signs	interactional greeting, mutual and self-recognition, gesture of group and self defiance
grito, e.g. "amor de rey" (Latin Kings), "de corazon" (Netas)	personal membership claim, micro-ritual of commitment & respect for group, claim of independence, autonomy and self-determination, Latino self- and cultural affirmation
universals (monthly meetings)	organizational necessity, informational forum, time for

universals (monthly meetings) con't	active dialogue and analysis,
	conection to history,
	friendship renewal, solidarity reinforcement
	macro-ritual of group integration

Although the above requires a more detailed expositon, it should suffice to indicate the extraordinary weight attached to symbolism within these contemporary groups. As McLaren (1993) has demonstrated, so much of the enactment and construction of every day life comes in the form of micro- and macro-rituals which are crucial to the production and reproduction of current power relations. These street organizations are no exception to this rule and with their increasingly conscious opposition to internal and external colonization, and their origins in the symbolically saturated and contested world of the prison system, they struggle openly for what Bhaba (1994) has called a "third space" between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Discussion:

The above comparative interpretations offer some important reminders of the limitations in the dominant paradigms of gang theory. Part of the problem has been that since the 1960's, instead of viewing gang subcultures through their interface with conditions of poverty, changing capitalist social relations and increasing state controls of working-class and poor youth, it was the practice of delinquency and crime that became the main focus of inquiry. Today, it is still this criteria that is part of the "root paradigm" (McLaren ibid.) used to conceptually distinguish whether a group is a clique, a gang or part of a street corner society. Two prominent researchers and their associates put it this way:

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"Some gangs are more violent than others, some are more instrumental than others, some are more involved in drug use than others and so on. Although this variation across gangs exists, it does not detract from the virtually universal finding that gang members are much more heavily involved in delinquency and drug use than non gang members (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Chard-Wierschem 1993).

And Klein (1995:30), exhibiting a little more caution, states:

"Where is the tipping point beyond which we say, "Aha - that sure sounds like a street gang to me? I suggest two useful signposts.

The first...is a commitment to a criminal orientation...Note carefully, however, that I specify orientation, not a pattern of serious criminal activity, as many in the enforcement world might require.....My second signpost, admittedly difficult to judge from outside the group: the group's self-recognition of its gang status."

For most gang-focussed social scientists, therefore, the practice of crime remains the marker that signifies a gang's presence and that accentuates its "difference" from other normative social groups. These empiricist foci, however, contain at least four central flaws that limit their explanatory power.

First, they leave little room for longitudinal considerations of gang subcultures. Second, they overlook the gang as an historically-emergent phenomenon. Third, they are non-reflexive and rarely question the underlying "domain of assumptions" (Gouldner 1970) that constitute social science discourse. Fourth, they overlook the contradictoriness (or dialectics) of agency within gang membership, e.g. the notion that youth may be joining gangs as much to shape them as to be shaped

by them.[13] As Conquergood (1992:23) concludes:

> "[I]f ethnography (also read social science - author) is to do something other than reinscribe domination through collapsing or fetishizing difference, it needs to juxtapose cultures and dialogize voices in such a way that the investigator's culture is defamiliarized in the encounter with the Other."

Conquergood's plea for a more critical approach to the study of these subcultures seems to be especially borne out with groups as complex and contradictory as the Latin Kings and the Netas. Based on the above data, it is simply not possible to understand these emergent social movements of ghetto and barrio youth from the traditional criminological empiricist standpoint. To this extent, the British tradition of critical cultural studies, although usually overlooked, offers an alternative to the "tautological" impasse (Morash 1983) of gangs, drugs, crime and violence that dominates the American literature on the subject.

Conclusion:

During the last twenty years, street gangs in New York City have gone through several stages of development becoming street organizations in the most recent phase. There are a host of reasons to explain why this has occurred and it would require an analysis that goes beyond the above descriptive comparisons to engage this intriguing question. Nonetheless, such an analysis would have to include the increased importance of street-prison social support systems; the marginalization of poor barrio and ghetto youth that fosters an anti-colonial consciousness; the timely influence of

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13Rarely do researchers ask whether gangs have the possibility of becoming more than the criminal sum of their parts, or whether membership in groups with strong internal bonds, community ties, long subcultural histories, can be the basis of social innovation rather than social desctruction and maladaptation?

politicized "old heads"; the changing nature of the illicit economy and its capacities for self-regulation; the qualitative non-violent evolution of street subcultures; and the changing role of women in the new subcultures.

Whatever etiology lies behind this transformation, however, it is clear that this period sees gangs creating new sophisticated alternative subcommunities consisting of broad socio-political and cultural associations, organizing both the free and incarcerated. While parallels will inevitably be made with the rise and fall of the "Vice Lords" of 1960's Chicago fame, it is unlikely that today's governments (either federal, city or state) will provide the co-optational largesse nor are these groups particularly interested in receiving such aid. Rather, expressing distinct goals of self-determination and self-help, they have developed a political outlook that resembles a grassroots social movement with an eclectic ideology that is spiritualistic, communitarian, utopian and organically anti-Establishment (see also Horowitz and Liebowitz 1968).

In Hebdige's terms, while an orthodox criminologist might focus primarily on the appearance of delinquency sui generis, a critical culturalist will see these subcultures as organized, collective self-expressions filled with symbolic gestures and liminal resistances that militate against the hegemonic culture. This culture, saturated with the privileged knowledges, paradigms, rituals, practices and customs (Bourdieu 1984) of the white, Anglo-Saxon, middle- and upper-classes is also expressed in the gang literature itself. This is perhaps one reason why so little has been written from the historical agency standpoint of possibility or transcendance -both critical tenets of the British culturalist school. Ironically, without such combined approaches, many of the current street organizations cannot be fully analyzed because, quite simply, they do not fit into the criminological gang constructions that dominate the discourse. Yet, such organizations are likely to grow as the

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organic intellectuals of the ghettos and barrios disprove the thesis that the underclass is headless (if not heedless) and the "wretched of the earth" is a passe concept.

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